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California Farmland Conservancy Program

Focus on Farmland

Newsletter of the CFCP
Spring 2007

This edition of Focus on Farmland features:

- Easement Grants in Madera and Monterey Counties
 - Recent Planning Grant Awards
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Wattenbarger Farm is Permanently Protected

The Wattenbargers don't have to drive too far off their 216-acre farm to see approaching development. "There's a lot more traffic, and Fresno's a lot closer than it used to be," said Anna Wattenbarger, who has lived on the property with her husband, Bill, since the mid-1960s. Recent statistics from the Department of Conservation corroborate her remarks: 18,801 acres of farm and grazing land in Fresno, Kings, Merced, Madera, and Tulare counties were converted to non-agricultural uses between 2002 and 2004. But thanks to the conservation efforts of the Wattenbargers, the San Joaquin River Parkway & Conservation Trust, and the California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP), the Wattenbarger's farm will never be a conversion statistic.

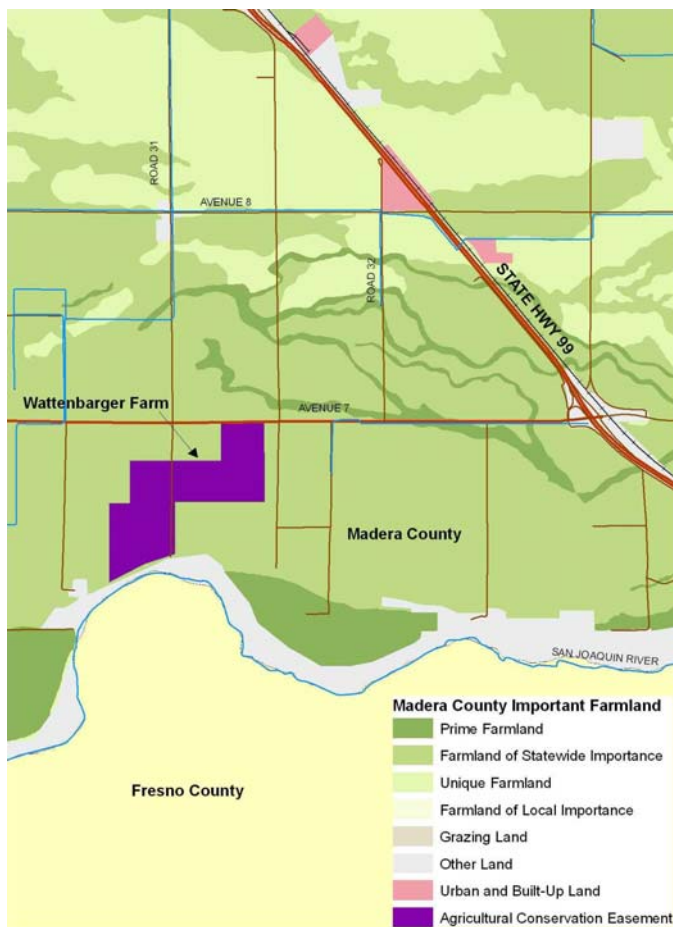


Almond trees on the Wattenbarger farm in Madera County

The Wattenbarger farm is one of several farmed by the Wattenbarger family, and is located between the cities of Fresno and Madera along the northern edge of the San Joaquin River in Madera County. Through the CFCP, the Department of Conservation awarded \$585,000 towards an agricultural conservation easement grant to the San Joaquin River Parkway & Conservation Trust, a non-profit corporation created in 1988 to protect and restore the San Joaquin River and its surroundings in the rapidly urbanizing Fresno-Madera region. The CFCP's grant was matched by a bargain sale contribution by the landowners and a donation to the Trust for ongoing monitoring and stewardship of the easement.

In partnership with state and federal agencies and local governments, the Trust has been successful in protecting land through fee title acquisition, conservation easements, and wildlife habitat restoration. The CFCP previously awarded the Trust a planning grant to develop potential agricultural conservation easements; the Wattenbarger Farm project is a direct result of that partnership.

"We must ensure the San Joaquin River continues to support the farmers, families, fish and other wildlife that depend on the river," said Dave Koehler, executive director of the Trust. "We hope that



Wattenbarger farm shown located between the cities of Fresno and Madera along the northern edge of the San Joaquin River

other landowners take note of what the Wattenbarger family has done. It makes great sense for those landowners who are committed to farming, and to being good stewards of the land.”

Bill Wattenbarger’s grandparents, Martha and Gilmore “Mac” Wattenbarger, began the farm in 1915. The Wattenbarger’s son, Dan is the fourth generation farming the land. The Wattenbargers have added to the property over the years and have grown all kinds of crops on the land – at various times, cotton, corn, sugar beets, alfalfa according to Anna Wattenbarger.

Today, the farm produces Thompson seedless raisins, almonds and Zante currants.

DeSerpa Ranch Sells Agricultural Conservation Easement

The Monterey County Agricultural and Historical Land Conservancy (MCAHLC) and CFCP have recently partnered to establish an agricultural conservation easement on the 55-acre DeSerpa Ranch in the Salinas Valley of Monterey County. The property is located just over a mile west of the City of Salinas’s sphere of influence, in the Blanco District, which includes some of the most productive and desirable land in the valley. The property’s prime soils are used to grow the typical vegetable row crops of the area, with two successive crops being harvested annually. Due to the weather patterns of morning fog, the property is located in one of the few areas of the United States that is suitable for lettuce and other cool season vegetable crop production in the summer months.

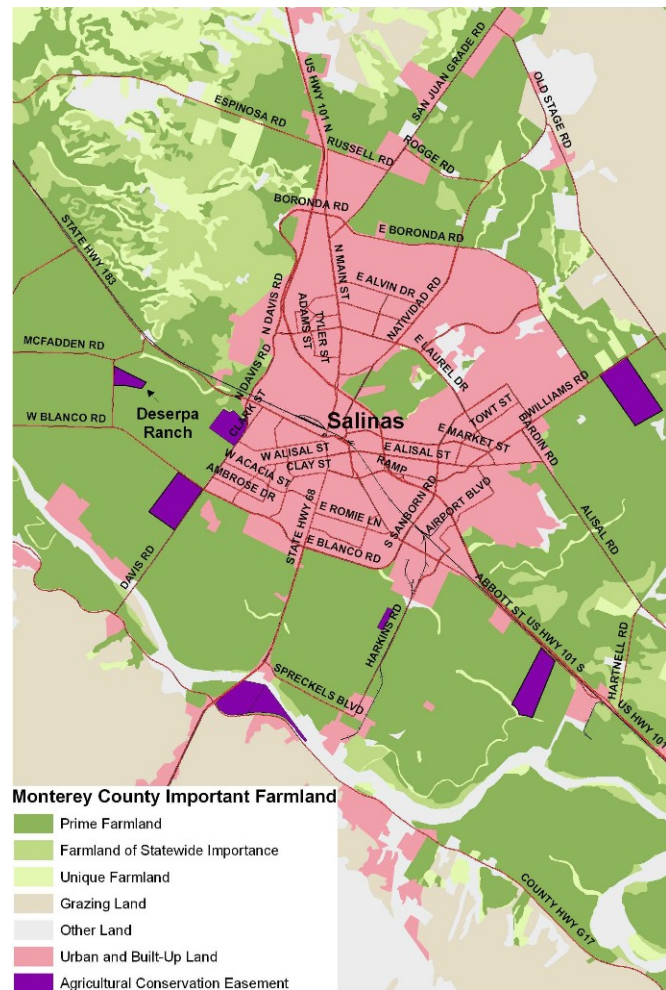


DeSerpa Ranch in Monterey County near Salinas

Kimberly and Dan DeSerpa spent only a brief part of their childhood on the small farm near Salinas their grandfather established in the late 1800s. Yet it made such an impression on them that they decided to pass on the potential riches developing the property could have brought, choosing to permanently preserve their land.

“I’m an ordinary person, not someone who has a lot of money,” Kimberly DeSerpa said. “I know that the local school district paid millions of dollars to acquire a farm near ours to build a new school. We might have been able to make that kind of money on our property if we were willing to see it paved over. But I care about protecting the Earth and I have deep feelings for this property. I felt that preserving the farmland was the right thing to do. It’s our homestead farm. My grandmother did a great job of saving it for me. I want to save it for generations to come.”

This easement furthers MCAHLC’s strategy of encouraging development toward lesser-quality soils east of Salinas. To date, Monterey County has been the focus of more CFCP grants than any other county: 21 conservation easements on approximately 5,400 acres of farmland. MCAHLC purchased the easement with \$327,250 in CFCP funding and a \$57,750 donation from the landowner via bargain sale. MCAHLC has participated in over 60 projects that collectively protect over 19,000 acres in Monterey County. These projects include vegetable croplands, vineyards, open space, and rangeland. For more information about MCAHLC, please visit its website at www.mcahlc.com.



DeSerpa Ranch shown west of the City of Salinas in Monterey County

Recent CFCP Planning Grant Awards

Eastern Sierra Land Trust

The CFCP awarded the Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) a planning grant to implement a program for the protection of agricultural lands in specific areas of Mono County. According to the ESLT, “Farming and ranching is second only to tourism in sustaining the economic well-being of the Eastern Sierra. But today the long-term future of this historic activity is under threat from population growth and related land speculation and development.” The grant will support staffing to coordinate both outreach and the implementation of the farmland conservation program. The outreach component is designed to educate agricultural landowners, area professionals, and local decision-makers about the ESLT and agricultural land conservation. The implementation component involves data collection and project prioritization in the Tri-Valley and Antelope Valley areas of Mono County -- areas with significant alfalfa and other hay crop production. The ESLT will then pursue those projects that show

greatest promise and initiate appraisals and other conservation easement work with the goal of securing funding for four or more projects to by the end of the grant term.

Incorporated in 2001, the ESLT is a nonprofit organization protecting working landscapes and important natural ecosystems of the Eastern Sierra. For more information about the Eastern Sierra Land Trust please visit www.easternsierralandtrust.org.

Northern California Regional Land Trust

The CFCP awarded the Northern California Regional Land Trust (NCRLT) a planning grant to implement the land trust's Agricultural Land Protection Agreement Project, which seeks protection of prime agricultural lands and natural areas by assisting landowners in securing conservation easements in Butte, Glenn and Tehama counties. The concept of agricultural land conservation is relatively new to the region. The NCRLT believes that conducting an extensive landowner outreach program and working towards acquiring agricultural easements will provide the exposure and credibility necessary for long term agricultural land protection of the tri-county region.

The NCRLT was founded in 1989 and incorporated as a nonprofit tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service to assist Northern California landowners and public agencies in the voluntary protection of land and other natural resources. NCRLT completed a 4,300-acre conservation easement on the Llano Seco Ranch in Butte County in June of 2006. The Llano Seco project received funding from the CFCP to preserve 1,870 irrigated acres of cropland as well as grazing and riparian land. For more information about the NCRLT, please visit www.landconservation.org.

Although the bulk of CFCP grant awards are for agricultural conservation easement acquisitions, the program also offers planning and technical assistance grants that support agricultural land conservation and easement acquisition work. Activities and costs that may be supported through overall conservation planning work may include appraisals, surveys, title review, staff and consultant costs, and other costs directly related to bringing agricultural conservation easements to the acquisition stage. For more information about CFCP planning grants, please visit our [website](#).

In Brief:

DWR Draft Guidelines for the Flood Protection Corridor Program: Proposition 84 provides \$40 million in grant funding to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to continue the Flood Protection Corridor Program, originally established by Proposition 13 in 2000. The Flood Protection Corridor Program funds the acquisition of interests in land within priority flood corridors to minimize property loss, while also preserving wildlife habitat and agricultural land resources. The Flood Protection Corridor Program may be a potential source of match funding for certain CFCP grant applications. DWR has released draft grant guidelines and grant application instructions for these new funds, which are modeled after the original allocation of Proposition 13 funds. The formal public comment period for these documents ended April 30, 2007, but the documents may still be reviewed at www.floodsafe.water.ca.gov.

CFCP News Updates:

Annual Monitoring Reports Due to CFCP Soon: For organizations holding easements acquired with CFCP funding, annual monitoring reports for each easement are due by June 30. A one-page letter

describing the method of monitoring and the condition of the property is sufficient. A [sample form](#) is available on the CFCP website.

Internet Resource: CFCP has developed a **new checklist** to assist CFCP easement acquisition grant recipients. The checklist lists and describes the typical requirements of CFCP easement acquisition grant agreements in a user-friendly format. The new [checklist](#) is posted on the CFCP website.

CFCP Staff News: The CFCP is pleased to announce the addition of **Larelle Burkham-Greydanus** to the program team. Larelle comes to us from the Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, where she has been involved with field mapping and other farmland inventory tasks. She will be serving the CFCP as a grant manager, initially focusing on administration of planning/technical assistance grants.

Upcoming Events:

The **Bay Area Open Space Council's Ninth Annual Conference** is on Wednesday, June 13th, 2007, from 8:30am to 4:30pm, at the Golden Gate Club, Presidio of San Francisco. Learn more about collaborative leadership, challenging assumptions and building healthier and whole communities in the Bay Area. For more information visit www.openspacecouncil.org/conference/conf2007/annual-conference-2007.

The **Land Trust Alliances's Rally 2007:** The National Land Conservation Conference is scheduled for October 3-6 in Denver, Colorado. Come to the largest gathering in the country for conservation leaders. Join more than 1,700 land trust professionals, volunteers, board members, public agency staff, attorneys, appraisers and land conservation advocates at this four-day conference. For more information visit www.lta.org/training/rally.htm.

The California Farmland Conservancy Program, administered by Department of Conservation's Division of Land Resource Protection, is designed to ensure that the state's most valuable farmland can be preserved. Through the program, local governments and nonprofit organizations can receive grants to purchase development rights from willing landowners, thus creating permanent conservation easements.

We hope you've found this issue of *Focus on Farmland* useful and informative. Please contact us with any questions or ideas you have for future editions. Feel free to forward this email to other interested parties.

If you wish to be added to or removed from this mailing list, email cfcf@conservation.ca.gov.

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